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SUBJECT: CUBA CONFERENCE DRAWS SUPPORT ACROSS PARTY LINES

Classified By: P/E COUNSELOR ERIC V. GAUDIOSI; REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) The Cuba Conference planned by the GoH and hosted by the International Center on Democratic Transition (ICDT) June 26 - 29 received favorable press coverage and strong statements of support across Hungary's political spectrum.

¶2. (SBU) In addition to the formal schedule, which highlighted Hungary's experiences through presentations by figures active in the system change of 1989-90, representatives of the Cuban opposition groups attending met with FM Goncz and the senior leadership of coalition and opposition parties. Of particular note was the agreement of FIDESZ leader Viktor Orban to begin a "sponsorship" program to assist the families of political prisoners in Cuba and to publicize their cases in the international media. Orban told Ambassador Foley that he regards this program as "a personal obligation." Cuban representatives also met with senior officials from the junior coalition SZDSZ party and with Dr. Ibolya David, leader of the opposition MDF party.

¶3. (C) Comment: The low-key approach to the conference advocated by the MFA has, in our view, produced significant results in highlighting the Cuba issue for the Hungarian public. More importantly, it has generated multipartisan support for Hungary's engagement in the issue, with the parties all but openly competing to give the Cuban delegation the warmest welcome. MFA officials continue to express their thanks for our understanding re their approach to the conference, and we believe the absence of a high-profile US delegation kept the focus appropriately on the Cuban opposition. We will use the unanticipated degree of public support across the political spectrum to encourage the GoH to take further steps on Cuba. End Comment.

FOLEY